

ZUDORA

A Great Mystic Story by Harold McGrath

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SYNOPSIS.

Zudora is left an orphan at an early age. Her father is killed in a gold mine. Zudora and the fortune from the mine, which grows to be worth \$20,000, are left in the guardianship of Frank Keene, Zudora's mother's brother. Zudora, giving promise of great beauty, reaches the age of eighteen. The uncle, who has set himself up as a Hindu mystic and is known as Hassam Ali, decides that Zudora must die before she can have a chance to come into possession of her money, so that it may be left to him, the next of kin. Hassam Ali sees an obstacle to his scheme in the person of John Storm, a young lawyer, for whom Zudora has taken a fancy, and he commands the girl to put the man out of her mind. Zudora insists that if she cannot marry Storm she will marry no one.

"Well, well," says Hassam Ali, "if you take such a stand I'll compromise. Solve my next twenty cases and you can marry him; fall in a single case and you must renounce him."

Zudora, using the knowledge gained from years of association with her uncle, unravels a baffling mystery and wins her first case—a case in which John Storm is saved from being convicted of a murder instigated by Hassam Ali himself.

Zudora and Hassam Ali visit Nabok Khan's house, where sleep overcomes every one whenever Nabok attempts to marry a princess. Storm, seeking Zudora, is made a prisoner. Zudora tells Nabok Khan, restores the princess to her original lover and saves Storm from death.

A maker of diamonds tells Hassam Ali his secret. Storm informs Zudora that his life is being attempted frequently. Storm suspects Hassam Ali. Storm is arrested for stealing the diamond maker's gems, but Zudora discovers the real thieves—a pair of mice.

The negro help employed on Storm's father's farm are fleeing because a great skeleton hand appears at night upon a hill near by. Storm is baffled in his investigation, but Zudora learns that her uncle has employed Jimmy Bolton, a half-witted man, thus to annoy Storm's parents. Zudora finds Bolton operating a big magic lantern and is attacked by him. Storm opportunely appears and saves her from Bolton.

Hassam Ali asks Zudora to find a gem lost by two mysterious old men. Zudora gets a photograph of the gem and it burns in her hand. An old house is mined by Hassam Ali and the old men. Storm and Zudora are lured there and narrowly escape destruction when the house blows up.

John McWinter, endeavoring to trap and kill George Smith, is killed himself, and Smith is charged with murder. Hassam Ali conspires to have John Storm meet the same fate as McWinter, and he and Storm are overcome by powerful forces. Zudora saves them, proves that McWinter's own dog trapped and killed him and saves Smith from a band of lynchers.

An inventor blows up a submarine with a powerful heat ray which he sends through water. Hassam Ali sends Zudora to a photograph of the gem and it burns in her hand. An old house is mined by Hassam Ali and the old men. Storm and Zudora are lured there and narrowly escape destruction when the house blows up.

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a couple of fairy story people."

"No, John. There seems to be an evil star of some sort hanging over me. Look what I've gone through!"

"But you've gone through it, and if you had what you call an evil star I don't think you would be here. Let's get married."

"No. I don't want to hurt you, John, but I feel oppressed. I feel as if some danger were hovering near me. I've lost some of that confidence I had when Uncle Frank was alive. And dear, I don't want to drag you into it."

"That's nonsense. When a man loves a woman as I love you, why shouldn't he share trouble and happiness alike? I never liked your uncle Zudora. And I still hold to this day that he was your evil star, if you had one."

"John?"

"I know—one shouldn't speak ill of the dead. I never could get the idea out of my head that he was in some way connected with your narrow escapes. What he had in mind I don't know, nor can I figure out what he had in view. You won't marry me, then?"

"Not while I feel as I do, John."

"I suppose I'll have to grin and bear it," he said with an assumption of cheerfulness. "Now this burnt scrap of paper comes back, like the cat. Lots of letters weren't touched, but this one particular piece had to be damaged by fire. A mine of diamonds, but, in heaven's name, where?"

"Perhaps I'd better put the whole thing out of my thoughts. It does look impossible. But never doubt that I love you, John."

"I don't doubt it. What I doubt is the wisdom of your trying to go this thing alone."

"It is written," lightly. "After all, I'm something of an orientalist. What will be will be. Now talk to me about how you first came to love me. There are some things a woman never gets tired of, and that's one of them."

That was an easy matter for John. And Captain Radcliffe was making love, too, but not so successfully that he could hear any wedding bells in fancy.

Mme. Du Val sat in the salon playing the harp. She had a cynical humor. She believed that she might better play the harp here on earth than risk the chance of not playing one in the hereafter.

The captain crept up behind her softly and sprinkled a handful of rose leaves over her handsome head. She simply shrugged and went on with her playing.

Some cats like to be fondled. Mme. Du Val belonged to that category which did not.

"You've spoiled a rose," he said, trying to take her hands from the strings. "You bother me! I am not only playing; I am thinking. And there's a good deal to think about since we saw that locket. I'm wondering how to get rid of that girl. She isn't Hassam Ali's niece for nothing. She is shrewd, and so far as she is concerned we must walk carefully when we come into contact with her. Now, captain, I am not in the mood for love scenes, if you please."

"You drive me crazy sometimes!"

"I return the compliment. There goes the bell."

"Hang the bell!" he growled. He was not pleased to see the visitors, two men of his own class, but business was business.

He eyed Mme. Du Val covertly. She did not appear to exhibit any particular regret at the interruption.

As a matter of fact, the sight of her visitor relieved her.

Radcliffe was a persistent wooer, and rebuffs seemed to have no other effect than to redouble his ardor.

She ordered the footman to take away the harp and bring the cards and card tables.

"While we wait," she said, "we might as well while away the time pleasantly."

The fountain tinkled as usual. From time to time Mme. Du Val sent a glance toward it.

All at once the jet of water flew at a tangent. Radcliffe rose and touched the knob, lifting the panel which disclosed the secret elevator.

Three hard visaged men stepped into the room, blinking after their long burrow through the dark tunnels.

One of them was dressed in the flashy manner so dear to our native product—the gun man.

His name was Gyp, and, though he was not aware of it, he was on the short road to a certain unenvied chair.

There was something in his eyes that reminded you of the hyena. But a trained hyena has a marketable quality.

"Ike," said Radcliffe, "when you enter this house take off your hat. The next time I'll mash it down over your lamps."

"All right, cap. Th' light blinds me when I comes in here, an' I forget. Well, we're ready."

Mme. Du Val shrugged and crossed over to the gem vault. She despised

these tools, but in crime one has to take what tools one can.

And there was always the possibility of these low brutes speaking incautiously during some drinking bout.

She brought the little box—gem back. Then Radcliffe drew the sign on a piece of paper—a heart with a dagger running through it.

This was a kind of key that would open a certain door. The initials of each were then written within the heart, which was surrendered to Gyp.

This sort of business was after his own heart. He did not like directness except when he struck, after the fashion of his prototype, the rattlesnake.

About that same hour, half after 8, Detective Hunt was going carefully over a package of partly burnt letters, those rescued from Hassam Ali's house before the fire got beyond control.

He was studying each bit of paper with scrupulous care. The door opened. He looked up impatiently.

"Oh, Storm! Come in; interesting work here, but I haven't found anything worth a wooden toothpick."

"I want you to look at this, Hunt," said Storm, producing the burnt piece he had shown Zudora that afternoon.

"Hum! Where did you find it?"

"In the cellar of the burnt house."

"Thuh." He searched it thoroughly under his magnifying glass. "Haven't come across any mate to it. Come! Dig into these and see what you can find."

By and by he came upon a half burnt letter that made him sit up with a jerk. Then he laughed shortly. "Mme. Du."

"John, did Hassam Ali know a woman by the name of Mme. Du?"

"Mme. Du? Not that I'm aware of, but he knew a Mme. Du Val."

"Ah, I see!" Then the detective stacked those letters he had gone through and picked up his pipe. "Queer old coddler, that Hassam Ali. These scraps of paper prove to me that crooks are the most credulous people in the world."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, he seemed to know some of the biggest in the country, and they always went to him when in doubt. Evidently thought he could look into the future and tell them whether they'd go to jail or not. Crooks are peculiar people, believe me, boy. Now let's go out and get a bite somewhere. I've been cramped up in this caboose since 3 this afternoon."

"Nothing about the diamonds?"

"Not an eyelash. But there's a vague mention of a couple of tons of gold."

"What?"

"Gold. But whose it is or where it is, nix. Shop's closed for the night. But there's one thing. There's some fancy diamond smuggling going on and some fancy diamond cutting besides. And your Uncle Dudley's going to nail 'em one of these days."

And that fancy diamond cutter himself was wondering how long this soft snap was going to last.

To take a known diamond and make it an unknown one was the main trick of his present occupation.

It was good money and little danger so far as he was concerned.

His room was in a garret in a particularly deserted tenement. He was rarely disturbed by any one but the janitor, who was old and nearsighted and

here he kept his gems and "chips," for a diamond cutter knows the value of "chips."

The cutter himself was rather a frowny looking old chap. He wore a greasy old broadie dressing gown and eyeglasses which resembled the chauffeur's goggles.

He finished polishing a stone, looked it up and left the room. In the hall outside this den was a dumb waiter. From this he took a can of oil and returned.

He filled the lamp and lit it, then sat down and smoked his pipe in the attitude of waiting for some one.

At 9 three men arrived at the door of the tenement. They stood idly in the doorway for a minute, then ducked inside.

But Jim Baird, who had been following them steadily for an hour or more, was quite confident that somewhere in yonder tenement was the wonderful crook diamond cutter he had so often heard about during his masquerade as Hassam Ali.

What a chance there had been for real honest money in that old inventor of diamonds whose shop had been back of the cheese maker's! But he had to go and die.

Baird did not thrill pleasantly at the sight of the gun man called Gyp. He had already in his capacity as a reporter run up against that murderous scoundrel, and Gyp had sworn he'd "get him."

He loitered about, wishing to give the rogues plenty of time. What he wanted was a good look at the diamond cutter's shop.

He had no interest in the three crooks who had shown him the way here. Two of them had beaten him up not more than a fortnight gone, so he was perfectly willing to keep out of their way.

The crooks climbed the three flights of rickety, creaking stairs until they came to the lapidary's door.

The gun man used the knocker. With his machine humming the cutter could not hear the sound of ordinary knuckles.

Gyp rapped three times and then shoved aside the knocker, revealing a small hole.

He passed through a slip of paper—

ing his friend doing a little night work. Sure enough, Hunt was at work. Storm had gone home, and Baird was rather glad to have missed him.

Not that he disliked the young lawyer; rather that he envied him his good luck.

Zudora Keene was the kind of woman who led men to great endeavors. Was it not due to her that he had chosen the straight and narrow way and was making good in it?

There was one thing. Zudora must never, never know the role he played. When Hassam Ali died his double had gone with him.

"Say, Baird, you're just the chap I want to see. Did you ever do any corresponding in that Hassam Ali game?" asked Hunt.

"How do you mean?" returned Baird, rather disheartened. Here was Hunt resurrecting the dead!

"I mean did you answer or receive letters addressed to him when he was too ill to attend to them?"

"Yes."

"What was the nature of his acquaintance with Mme. Du Val?"

"Rather formal, so far as I know."

"Nothing between them?"

"There may have been. You see, Hunt, it was only toward the last that I really did any Hassam Ali stunts. And I wish to heaven you'd forget that part of my past. I'm trying hard enough."

Hunt put his hand on the young man's shoulder. "Cheer up. I shan't mention it again."

"Thanks. Now I've a bit of good news for you. I've seen the man who does that mysterious cutting. I know where his shop is, and I have seen him at work."

"Fine! Wait a minute." Hunt took down a fat volume and turned the pages rapidly. "Here, did he look any thing like this?"

"Line for line!"

"I thought so. He's been lying low. If you know where he lives you might take me around there and give me the lay of the land for future use, mind you."

"Come along, then."

At half past 10 Zudora sat before the fireplace in her room twirling the bracelet and vaguely wondering why she felt this premonition of evil. If she told Storm about the gold he might believe that that stood between them and the altar. So she must still keep that a secret. What was that? She started up with a repressed shriek. Before the window appeared the ghostly form of a woman. It seemed to dissolve into nothing even as she looked. Zudora's cry, however, brought in Mrs. Ramsey, the landlady.

"What has happened, child?"

"I don't know, but either I've seen a ghost or some one is playing a sorry trick on me."

The two examined the window, drew back the curtains and peered outside. There was nothing to be seen.

"Perhaps you were dreaming," suggested Mrs. Ramsey.

"I never dream with my eyes open, not that kind of a dream," declared Zudora stoutly. "Some one has attempted to frighten me, and perhaps the best thing I can do is to make believe that he or she has succeeded. I'll

"Surest thing, boy?"

"Hand 'em over. An', say, start 'er up. I never seen a diamond nicked down."

"Jus' to please the ladies!" cried the lapidary, going to his machine.

It took a long time for his friends to come down, thought Baird. Finally he determined to risk meeting them.

He entered the building and tiptoed up the stairs. The burr of machinery caught his ear, and he knew that he need not go any farther.

He tried the doorknob, but only half heartedly. Such a door would never be unlocked.

Then he heard voices. All were there yet. If he could but find a rope!

He peeked into the dumb waiter and found an unused coil of Manila hemp on the top of it. Just what he wanted.

Next he hunted around for the scuttle ladder and crept up on to the roof. He tied the rope to a chimney and gently lowered himself down to the lapidary's window.

Nothing doing there. Blinds were closed. He could see four men, but could not distinguish any features. And what he wanted most of all was one good look at the man who pared fortunes from diamonds, as it were. He wanted this knowledge keenly.

Ah, he was turning! The light was striking in his face. Baird drew himself up quickly, regained the hall and stole down the street.

If Hunt's private rogue's gallery held no likeness of this cutter, then it was a find, a scoop.

He set out for Hunt's office, knowing that he had a fair chance of catch-

ing his friend doing a little night work. Sure enough, Hunt was at work. Storm had gone home, and Baird was rather glad to have missed him.

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